

THE BRITISH PEERS.

A DEFENCE OF THEIR PATRIOTISM AS MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT.

SELF-SACRIFICES THEY MAKE ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR PUBLIC SPIRIT—HOW THEIR OPPOSITION TO LEGISLATION MAY BE OVERCOME—PLANS FOR REFORMING THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

Inasmuch as Sir William Harcourt and the Earl of Rosebery have just announced that either the abolition or the radical reorganization of the House of Lords is to constitute the first and principal plank of the new Liberal platform in Great Britain, a few brief notes on the subject of this time-honored institution, which the two leaders of the Whig party denounce as obsolete and as constituting an obstacle to progress and reform, may be of timely interest, all the more as a good deal of misapprehension exists not only in America, but even in England itself, with regard to the duties, prerogatives and the status of members of the upper chamber of the British Legislature. Indeed, the vaguest notions prevail as to what is meant by a "peer," and there are many whose ideas upon the subject are limited to the belief that he is a species of gorgeously attired drone, who wears a crown on his head on state occasions, who is exempt from the ordinary pains and penalties of the law, and who is treated by his fellow-citizens with a deference and regard that cannot find any better expression than in the words "my lord," which are used in formally addressing him.

The Peers of the British Empire are to be seen at their very best during the prayer with which the proceedings in the House of Lords are opened every afternoon when Parliament is in session, and I do not believe that a more curious and characteristic spectacle than that which they present on these occasions can be witnessed in any other legislative chamber of the world. During the prayers, which are recited by the junior of the spiritual peers present, arrayed in full canonicals as a bishop, with

to be looked upon as the vested right of certain great houses of the nobility. Many of the members of the House of Lords are indifferent to promotion in the peerage, especially if their title happens to be an old one, preferring to be at the head of the barons or viscounts rather than at the tail end of the marquises and earls. Most of them, moreover, possess sufficient wealth to render them indifferent to the emoluments of office and to the opportunities of political corruption. What else than a sense of public duty, for instance, impels that most indolent and perpetually bored of men, the Duke of Devonshire, whose only pleasure in life is horse racing, to devote himself to politics and to saddle himself with the cares and obligations of office? A duke, a Knight of the Garter, possessed of an enormous fortune, there is absolutely nothing in the shape of reward or preferment for which he can possibly look, and if he remains in politics, which are notoriously distasteful to him, it is only because he has a strong sense of what he believes to be the obligations of his order—of the men of his class—to the commonwealth.

It was that same sense also to which, first of all, the late Count Julius Andrassy, and after him Count Kalnoky, referred when, in resigning the chancellorship of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they intimated to their sovereign that they considered they had fulfilled their share of what they believed to be their civic and patriotic duty. They each of them remained in office for about fifteen years, laboring hard for the weal of their country and sacrificing all their Austrian love of ease, pleasure and, above all, sport. They were counts of the Empire when they entered into office, and occupied the same rank in the aristocracy after their resignation, while they left the chancellorship in each instance considerably poorer in pocket than when they assumed it. This public spirit is one of the most admirable features of the British House of Lords, the members of which, I need scarcely add, follow the example of their fellow-legislators in the lower chamber of Parliament in neither asking nor receiving any pay from the nation for the performance of their duty to their fellow-citizens.

Another matter of which people, both at home

as those which old parliamentarians have by the dozen up their sleeve. But where large and growing majorities in the Commons have furnished clear and indisputable evidence of the real will of the nation, the House of Lords has never hesitated to yield, even though the prejudices and interests of the caste which it more especially represents have been at stake. Moreover, if it does oppose progressive legislation, its opposition can always be overridden by what is known as a Royal Warrant, such as was invoked and applied by Mr. Gladstone while Prime Minister in 1871. His government had brought forward a scheme of reorganization of the army, which contained provisions for the abolition of the purchase and sale of commissions as officers. It passed the Commons, though not by a large majority. The Lords attempted to choke it off by means of dilatory tactics, whereupon Mr. Gladstone induced the Queen to sign a Royal Warrant, making the Army Reform bill a law, over the heads and without the sanction of the House of Lords. The application of this royal prerogative, while a violation of the spirit and practice of parliamentary government, was, nevertheless, in accordance with the letter of the Constitution. Having been used once, it can be invoked again, and so long as it lasts the House of Lords cannot be considered as exercising the power of veto over legislation which is attributed to it by so many of its foes, including Sir William Harcourt.

The projected reorganization of the House of Lords provides for the weeding out of what are euphemistically described as "weak" peers, that is to say, hereditary legislators whose intellectual abilities and, above all, whose conduct and mode of life render them in the eyes of the people unfitted to exercise a voice in the direction and control of the destinies of the immense British Empire. Special legislation is proposed for the purpose. But this is superfluous, and it will probably be found that when the Liberal party submits a bill for the weeding of the House of Lords, the great law officers of the present Administration will reply with the announcement that no such legislation is necessary, since the sovereign has the power, not only to create peers, but also to "dis-peer" them.

As a Scotch peer he could not sit in the House of Commons, and owing to the existence of a law repealed during the reign of Queen Victoria against the granting of United Kingdom peerages to Scotch peers, the only manner in which he could obtain admission to the upper house of the National Legislature was by waiting until the dissolution of Parliament, a general election, and his own election as one of the representative peers of Scotland.

Inasmuch as Queen Victoria is constitutionally debarred from the creation of any more Irish or Scotch peerages, it naturally follows that in course of time the entire peerage of Scotland and of Ireland will be absorbed into that of the United Kingdom. But, meanwhile, the position of those Scotch peers who are not among the sixteen representatives is extremely invidious. Although called upon to pay taxes, they have practically no voice in the conduct of the affairs of the nation, less even than the pettiest shopkeeper, since they are like the British policeman, and like the benefited clergymen of the Church of England, without an electoral franchise. Should the Government, therefore, ever adopt the scheme of the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, and subject the representation of the English peerage in the House of Lords to the same process of selection as the peerage of Scotland and Ireland, it is to be hoped that the Irish rather than the Scotch method will be adopted, and that those English peers who are not fortunate enough to secure election as representatives of their order in the House of Lords, will at least have the privilege of exercising the rights of citizenship of a commoner, and of presenting themselves at the polls for election to the House of Commons—that "other place" the very existence of which the House of Lords, according to ancient etiquette, continues to affect to ignore.

EX-ATTACHE.

ENTERTAINING GUESTS IN A FLAT.

LIMITATIONS OF PURSE DO NOT PREVENT SUCCESSFUL RECEPTIONS.

From The Chicago Times-Herald.

Entertaining is a fine art, and, like the other arts, is most successful when executed in simplicity and sincerity. Many residents in apartments fail to grasp the opportunity they have for a delightful reception of their friends. They plead in excuse of their dereliction the limitations of the flat or the expense involved.

Both these excuses are invalid for a small family of average income. The construction and arrangement of these latter-day dwellings render every bit of room available, not only for daily living, but for entertaining guests as well. The dainty reception-room and comfortable dining-room charm all comers, and the admirably appointed kitchen, with shining gas range and open plumbing, invites inspection and delights the hearts of men and women with its promise of good cheer.

If happy honeymooners wish to show their friends their charming ménage, the reception can be planned and carried out with little extra labor and expense. In the morning of the eventful day, madam having "set her house in order," cuts white bread and brown in thin slices and butters them; some she makes into sandwiches with devilled eggs, salad, potted ham, while some she leaves as plain bread and butter. While this is being done her coffee is being dripped, and the golden-brown beverage is left ready for heating, while the chocolate is placed in the chocolate pot ready for hot water or milk to bring it to delicious perfection. She has ordered from her baker fresh rolls and from her groceryman toothsome oysters and crisp celery. After luncheon madam places the dining table against the wall and arranges thereon and on the built-in sideboard decorative and suggestive piles of shining dishes, glittering glass and silver and snowy linen. She decorates the two with the flowers which monsieur has sent to surprise her. Then she looks once more at the sandwiches and bread and butter, rolled carefully in a damp cloth. After which housewifely tasks she takes a nap and a refreshing bath.

Evening finds her arrayed in fine clothing and putting the finishing touches to monsieur's toilet by tying his cravat and placing the flower in his coat. The two receive the guests and a little music arranged beforehand or a game of cards and conversation fill the first hour or two. Then comes the crowning triumph of the occasion. If monsieur has a pretty talent for a chafing-dish he takes command of the cuisine while madam does the honors of the drawing-room, otherwise madam is queen in the kitchen. The gas is lighted in the range and, presto! the rolls in the oven, the drip coffee, the foaming chocolate and the oysters in the pan are heated in a trice.

It is a clever move in dramatic art for the author to take the audience into his confidence, so the authors of this hospitable scene take their guests with them in their occupations. The savory odors fill the air with anticipatory joy, the men hobnob in the kitchen and the women twitter in the dining-room. Everybody helps the host and hostess and themselves. There is no formal chill of delay, but a pleasurable glow of freedom and comment. Everybody eats and drinks. Old Curmudgeon forgets to be surly and young Dapper shows he is really a good fellow.

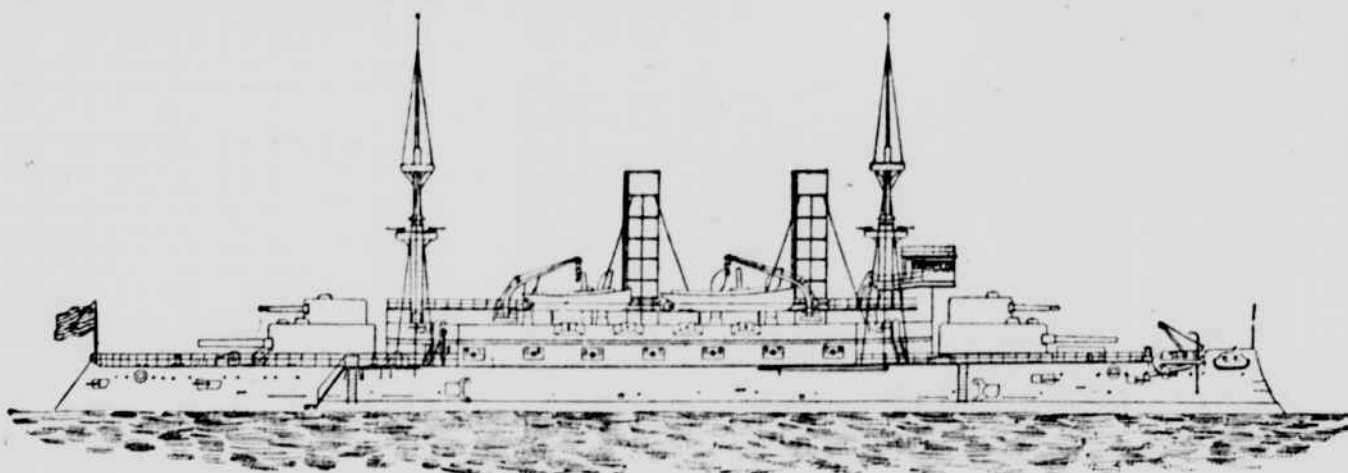
There is a sincere ring to the good nights with their honest comments, "Jolly good time," and "so sweet of you not to be formal."

Of course, the menu can be extended, and a maid in taking cap and apron is no drawback to the merriment of the hour, but the point illustrated is that the flat itself can be a factor in the entertainment of the guests.

A CAT THAT LIKES ELEVATORS.

From The Philadelphia Record.

The Philadelphia Bourse is the home of a very intelligent cat. This tabby, which is coal black, without a single white spot upon her, has a fondness for travelling in the elevator. She is perfectly at home there, and travels up and down many times daily. She goes to the door of the elevator shaft and mews until the car comes along and takes her on. The various elevator men are very careful of her, for she is a great mouser, and in the Bourse, as in other big buildings, mice are troublesome. These little pests frequently destroy valuable documents supposedly safely stowed away in desks and drawers. Tabby notifies the elevator men what floor she desires to get off upon by mewing loudly as the car comes to the particular story. In this way she makes a tour of inspection of the entire building.



BROADSIDE PLAN OF THE NEW COASTLINE BATTLE-SHIPS KENTUCKY AND KEARSARGE.

lawn sleeves, rochet, hood, etc., every one of the temporal peers kneels, some of them on the floor of the House, others on the benches, presenting much the aspect of a lot of bald-headed and gray-bearded children performing their devotions. Curiously, it is only the spiritual peers, that is to say, the archbishops and bishops, who do not think it worth while to kneel to the Almighty. Their Graces of Canterbury and York, as well as their right reverend colleagues, attired in their ecclesiastical vestments, without which they may not enter the House, remain seated and content themselves with merely inclining their heads and looking very solemn. The public never has a glimpse of this. Even the reporters are excluded from the gallery of the House until after the last "amen" has been pronounced, and it was merely by a piece of oversight and official negligence that an opportunity was afforded me of witnessing this well-nigh unique spectacle.

After having thus paid a well-deserved tribute to the piety of the hereditary legislators of Great Britain, a piety which is responsible for the objection which they manifest to have professed atheists, such as the Marquis of Queensberry, taking a seat among them, a word or two may be said on the subject of their public spirit. People on this side of the Atlantic have, as a general rule, small conception of the rôle which this form of patriotism plays in the Old World. In America it is seldom that a man devotes himself to politics unless he has an axe of one kind or another to grind. Sometimes the "loaves and fishes" take the form of office and of social preferment, while in other instances it is as a means of livelihood, legislators not only receiving large salaries, but having, moreover, unrivalled opportunities for making money. There is here little or no sense of civic obligation.

PUBLIC-SPIRITED PEERS.

In Europe, and more especially in Great Britain, this sense exists to a marked degree. The large majority of the House of Lords is composed of men who have absolutely nothing whatsoever to gain from devoting any of their time to public affairs. The great orders and decorations, such as the Garter, the Thistle and the St. Patrick, are not given as a reward for merit or hard work, but are merely a species of recognition of territorial influence, and are distributed in such a manner that they have come

and abroad, appear to lose sight in connection with the House of Lords is that it is to the peers that Great Britain, and, in a more or less degree, that the other civilized countries of the world, are indebted for the recognition by the Crown of popular rights and for the origin of parliamentary government. It was the barons by writ in the time of King John who wrested from that most disreputable and cowardly of English sovereigns what is known as the Magna Charta, that is to say, the basis of the British constitution and the foundation of all the prerogatives and rights of the people. Peers by writ are entirely different from the peers by patent, and enjoy a far greater degree of prestige than the latter. For the peers by writ are what is known in the German language as the "Uradel," and do not owe the creation of their title to royal favor. They were the great landowners and feudal chieftains at the time of the establishment of the monarchy, and are styled peers by writ because the King was wont to summon them by means of a writ to meet him in council and to advise with him upon matters concerning the welfare of the kingdom. It was this council of peers who considered themselves in point of nobility and lineage fully equal to the sovereign himself, and who therefore styled themselves the sovereign's "peers," that constituted the origin of the British Parliament, the most ancient national Legislature now in existence, and upon the example of which almost every modern Legislature is more or less modelled. Peerages by patent are of far less antiquity, and are practically unknown prior to the reign of King Henry VIII, the Blue Beard of English history. They have this difference as regards descent from the peerages by writ, that whereas the latter pass from father to daughter, if there be no son, the former, as a general rule, are limited to the male descendants of the house, and become not dormant or in abeyance, but absolutely extinct when none but female members of the house are alive.

Nor can the House of Lords be considered as an insuperable obstacle to progressive legislation. Whenever the Peers have constituted themselves as a barrier to measures sent up from the House of Commons, it has invariably been because the bills in question have been forced through the Lower Chamber by a narrow majority, or else by some political trick, such

as those which old parliamentarians have by the dozen up their sleeve. But where large and growing majorities in the Commons have furnished clear and indisputable evidence of the real will of the nation, the House of Lords has never hesitated to yield, even though the prejudices and interests of the caste which it more especially represents have been at stake. Moreover, if it does oppose progressive legislation, its opposition can always be overridden by what is known as a Royal Warrant, such as was invoked and applied by Mr. Gladstone while Prime Minister in 1871. His government had brought forward a scheme of reorganization of the army, which contained provisions for the abolition of the purchase and sale of commissions as officers. It passed the Commons, though not by a large majority. The Lords attempted to choke it off by means of dilatory tactics, whereupon Mr. Gladstone induced the Queen to sign a Royal Warrant, making the Army Reform bill a law, over the heads and without the sanction of the House of Lords. The application of this royal prerogative, while a violation of the spirit and practice of parliamentary government, was, nevertheless, in accordance with the letter of the Constitution. Having been used once, it can be invoked again, and so long as it lasts the House of Lords cannot be considered as exercising the power of veto over legislation which is attributed to it by so many of its foes, including Sir William Harcourt.

There are several precedents for the exercise of this last mentioned and but little known prerogative. Members of the House of Lords have been dis-peered in Tudor and Plantagenet times for disgraceful conduct, and there is also on record the case of a Duke of Bedford, who was "dis-peered" by King Edward IV, deprived of all his titles and reduced to the level of an ordinary esquire on the ground that in the estimation of the Crown he was too poor to maintain the rank of a Peer of the Realm. Every case of "dis-peerage" has, of course, been followed by the entire extinction of the peerage in question, none of the descendants being allowed to inherit it. The fact that the Crown possesses this prerogative of "dis-peerage" will doubtless be news to all those who believe that the only way by which a peer can be deprived of his title, and of his seat in the House of Lords, is by being attainted for high treason, or for felony. I may add that bankruptcy entails temporary withdrawal from the House of Lords, hereditary legislators who have been gazetted as insolvent being debarred from occupying their seats in the Upper Chamber until they obtain their full discharge from the courts.

It is believed that Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has some scheme in view, according to which the English peerage is to be subjected to the same process of selection as those of Scotland and Ireland. The peerages of these two sister kingdoms of England are represented in the House of Lords, Scotland by sixteen peers and Ireland by twenty-eight. The Scotch representative peers are elected for each new Parliament, the election taking place at Holyrood Palace at Edinburgh. The Irish representative peers hold their seats in the House of Lords for life from the time of their election. Whereas, however, Irish peers who are not called upon to represent their order in the House of Lords are eligible for membership in the House of Commons, Lord Palmerston having been able to sit in the House of Commons until the end of his days, in consequence of his being only an Irish peer, Scotch peers are debarred from the House of Commons; and thus it happened that early in the reign of King George III Lord North was actually Prime Minister for some time without having a seat in either House of Parliament, a unique instance of the kind in British history.